

This week marks the 236th anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence and the birth of our free and sovereign nation.

Fifty-six individuals signed the Declaration, though it is possible that few knew the historical significance the document would bear. Hardly might have they imagined then a nation as expansive and prolific as the United States of America today. Philosophically rooted in the fundamental concepts of liberty and justice, the U.S. has grown and prospered like few nation states in the history of the world.

Tomorrow, in communities stretching the map from Maine to Arizona and Washington to Florida, Americans will celebrate all that unites us as a country and a people: independence, liberty, love of country. I am always pleased to take part in Nebraska's community celebrations. In fact, I hope to see many of you in Seward, Nebraska's "Fourth of July City."

As we spend the holiday with families and loved ones, enjoying the festivals, parades, and fireworks displays in our communities – underlying it all we celebrate the clear and powerful words of the Declaration that inform our culture to this day: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness . . ."

Recently, I was reading the lyrics of the song "America the Beautiful." As we navigate a particularly turbulent period of national affairs, I once again paused to consider these words of the second stanza: "Confirm thy soul in self-control, Thy liberty in law."

They offer a reminder of our nation's capacity to overcome the greatest of challenges as long as we remain true to our foundational ideals, and remember those who have sacrificed before us and our obligation as citizens to protect and pass on the highest virtues of our national character.

Have a wonderful Fourth!